They offered to return us home. I didn't say no. So now I sit in the back seat of their pickup truck as they drive down a dirt road. We plunder and plunge up the hilly paths. The radio is broadcasting static from mixed signals bouncing off of the trees. It's only a matter of time before the alarm is rung and the campers learn who Cassie and I truly are.

For once I have time to prepare for a scenario. It isn't going to be long before we hit open road and open skies, but any time is some time and even some time is useful. I look to the packing and luggage they threw into the hatchback of the truck. I go over each and every item. I look to the cooler and then my gaze bounces to the folding chairs. Then I see the rifle. I know what I have to do. There's just the question of how to do it without getting caught.

"I need to pi—take a leak," I say, remembering whose company I'm in.

"Can't you hold it?" asks the driver.

"If you want a wet floor in your truck."

We stop. The door is opened and I disappear into the woods. I pray that this works. I hide behind a bush and start waiting. One minute goes by. Nothing happens. Two minutes go by. Squirrels knock some acorns off of the trees. Five minutes go by. Birds chirp. Ten minutes go by. I hear the crunching of leaves under the stomp of steel-toed boots. Time to make my move.

I sneak through the forest back to the truck. I'm by the hatchback when I hear footsteps in the distance. I jump in and startle Cassie as I begin rummaging around the baggage. I grab the rifle only to find that it's stuck under a shit-ton of junk. The driver comes out and wonders what the hell I'm doing. Over his curses and insults I hear the radio. Seems that we've got signal, and the truth is a secret no longer. I finally pull the gun out and nearly stumble over the edge, barely maintaining my balance. I hold the rifle towards his face.

"Take it easy there, hombre," the man says, holding his hands up. "We can talk

about this."

"Alright, here's how this is going to work," I say. "You three are going to stay here and I'm going to take this truck and be on my merry way. Is that a deal?"

The other two men emerge from the forest. They've got a look of immense surprise on their face. Clearly they didn't intend to get high-jacked on their way home. In warning I turn the rifle towards one of them and fire at the ground. The bullet causes an explosion of dirt and the gun drives my shoulder back further than it's ever been. I turn the gun back to the man in front of me and don't say a word. I'm too busy keeping a poker face, pretending that my shoulder isn't broken while wielding a heavy gun and thanking my lucky stars that the damn thing's loaded.

"You can take the truck," the man says calmly, "but what do you think you're going to accomplish by this? You just gonna keep running forever?"

"I—I—" I ponder.

The man's right. My original plan hasn't exactly gotten me far. What did I expect to happen? We cross the boarder and Cassie and I will be living the land of milk and honey for the rest of our lives? What do I expect to happen now? No man can run forever. There's really only one way that this can end, isn't there?

The man steps closer and I buck the gun. He steps back.

"Keys please," I demand.

"They're in the ignition."

I don't turn. I make another motion with the gun. After a few arduous seconds he tosses the key towards me. I catch it with my good arm and my bad one collapses

under the weight of the gun. It clambers to the floor. Everyone moves at once. The only motions I care about are my own. I jump from the hatchback and knock the man to the floor. I get up and dash inside the truck, locking the doors immediately before the two men standing make it. The keys are in the ignition and I'm off before they can reach the other side.

Did—did I really do that? Did I really steal a vehicle? Did I really hold a gun to another man's face? And did I really have every intention of shooting if I didn't get my way? What the hell have I become? I know what I'm doing, and I know why, but now another question is plaguing my mind like a swarm of hornets. Is it worth it? Or perhaps a better question is how far am I willing to go to get this done?

Then another thought makes itself known. It was able to stay hidden in the heat of the moment and so it was able to bury its way into the deepest crevasses of my mind. There's no way I can keep this going on forever. It's only a matter of time before the police catch me, and that's the best result. I go to jail and Cassie goes to hell.

Maybe forever was too much of a long shot. But then I start playing with the thought. If I can't keep Cassie on the run forever, how long can I keep this charade going? Just from the outset, every second on the run seems to be more precious and durable than every second she spent at "home."

And then I notice Cassie. She's looking at me with pure terror. She saw me, didn't she? She saw me hold the gun and threaten another man's life. She saw me fire a warning shot. She saw me attack that man. And she saw me steal the truck. How is she gauging the situation? I no longer see what's she hiding behind those eyes. I'm exiled.

A piercing ring breaks the air. I think I'm hearing things, but then it happens again. I pull over. Then I begin rummaging around for whatever is making this noise, more out of annoyance than anything else really. It's coming from the glove box, and unfortunately it's locked. Come to think about it, it might not be such a bad idea to check what supplies we've got at hand. I rummage through the keys, testing each one until the glove box pops open. The ring grows even louder. It's a cellphone. I know I'm going to regret this, but I answer it, and put the receiver to my ear.

"Finally you've decided to pick up," a woman's voice says. "When are you gonna get home? Johnny keeps bothering me about it. He misses you."

I hang up. I blink. The phone rings. My mind pieces a pretty little puzzle. A wife and son, maybe? The phone rings again. I answer it. I get a few tremors of curses. Definitely a wife. When she stops there's a silence. I've got to say something. I deepen my voice, trying to imitate at least one of theirs. I'm sure I got it wrong.

"Sorry... honey," I grumble. "We're going over some steep hills. I dropped the phone. Must of clicked off."

"You sound different. Are you sick or something?"

"Yeah... Josh caught a cold and gave it to the rest of us." I pray that this isn't Josh's wife. "We're on our way home now."

"Oh good, can you pick us up some milk on the way home?"

"Yeah sure."

"Love you."

"L—love you too," I say. Then I hang up the phone.

The phone falls to the floor. I look back at the road. Those three are probably still walking, and it'll be dark soon. They're on a road, but it's still heavily forested. I need to do something to rest my aching conscience. I see a folded map in the glove box. I begin to peruse it, hopeful for some clue to our current location. I'm in luck, plenty of red marks. So, we were in the St. Augustine woods. Shit. That's only a county over from where we started. No matter. I start dialing the phone.

"911, what's your emergency?"

"I saw a few men walking a few miles back. They're on Carson Street which cuts through the woods for a quite a long ways," I say looking at the map. "I think their car might have broken down. They looked disheveled like they were in an ordeal of some kind. They might have been car-jacked. Could you send a cruiser to check out the scenario?"

To my delight and misery the answer is yes. It settles my heart but rattles my brain. There's no denying that this was an incredibly stupid decision, but it's finally one that I was happy to make.